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FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6040
INFO RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE
RUEPGDA/USEUCOM JIC VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/CDRUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GE IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 3467
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHSQ/AMEMBASSY SKOPJE 4401
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 3200
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE 2975
RUEHVJ/AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO 0652
RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB 3190
RUEHPS/USOFFICE PRISTINA 3676
RUEHPOD/AMEMBASSY PODGORICA 0033
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2341
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0727
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0911
RUEHUP/AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST 0551

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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE

USAID FOR DCHA/OFDA, AID/W for OFDA Rob Andrew & Anne Convery
GENEVA PLEASE PASS TO USAID AND RMA
BUDAPEST PLEASE PASS TO USAID/RFMC

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: ALBANIA DISASTER DECLARATION

REF: A) TIRANA 662, B) TIRANA 664

11. I am declaring a disaster in Albania for the loss of property, loss of livelihoods, and the potential loss of life caused by heat wave-related wildfires currently raging throughout Albania, and I request USD 50,000 for immediate disaster relief from USAID/OFDA. The Government of Albania has made an official request for U.S. assistance to fight worsening wildfires throughout Albania. Per reftels, I renew our request for any and all possible U.S. assistance, whether from State, DOD, USAID, USDA, or any other source. Specifically, the GOA has requested rotary or fixed-wing aircraft capable of extinguishing fires. USG disaster relief resources will be used to help pay for critical aircraft to lift and drop water and other fire retardant material to support Albanian firefighters in order to bring under control the numerous fires located in remote areas which are difficult to reach by vehicles. The GOA is in receipt of one offer from a private (Czech) company which could provide firefighting aircraft to Albania for a fee. The fee quoted by the GOA was approximately 40,000 Euro for four days use of the aircraft. The GOA has a similar offer from a Swiss-German company.

12. Continuing severe heat and dryness are exacerbating the current fire situation, which has great potential to become worse, causing greater damage to livelihoods and loss of property if Albania does not receive additional assistance urgently. The Government of Albania (GOA) is doing all it can to bring the wildfires under control and protect property and lives, but the extent of the wildfires is unprecedented and GOA resources are not sufficient to adequately respond to this disaster. Other countries in the region are not able to provide much assistance to Albania, as they are fighting similar fires in their countries. We are not aware of any gratis assistance to Albania from other countries; the only offers of which we are aware involve payment for services. Therefore, the GOA is in need of immediate USG assistance to respond to the wildfires. Albania is a staunch ally which has stood with us in

Iraq and Afghanistan since the beginning of our actions in both countries, and it continues to augment its presence in both countries. It is in the USG interest to provide assistance. Financial assistance will alleviate the increased burden on Albania's already overtaxed budget, which we have urged them to use toward defense and other reform efforts associated with Albania's NATO and EU aspirations.

¶3. Since mid-July, Albania has faced severe forest fires as a result of the high temperatures and dry conditions predominating in the region. Fires have been active in 21 of the 36 districts of Albania. No casualties have yet been reported, although there are reports that several civilians have suffered from smoke inhalation, which is raising concerns about health issues particularly for children and the elderly in the areas where fires are located. The GOA's preliminary assessment is that some 2,000 hectares of forest have been destroyed and an additional 2,000 hectares of property may be destroyed without immediate foreign assistance in the next week. (NOTE: This is sensitive information and has not been publicly released.) Fifteen homes and four fire trucks have been destroyed thus far. The economic impact has not been fully evaluated, but will increase as the fires continue.

¶4. The GOA's Civil Emergency Department reported 32 active fires on July 25, 2007. This is an increase of 10 fires from the previous day and indicates that the number of fires is rapidly changing on a daily basis. The most serious fires were reported in the districts of Kolonja, (SE Albania); Vlora, (SW Albania); Puka, (Northern Albania); and Tropoja, (NE Albania). Four large fires were reported on July 26 to be out of control in Erseke (Korce district), Gjallice (Kukes district), Valbona (Tropoje district), and Llogara (Vlore district). A majority of military and police fire-fighting crews

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are trying to dig firebreaks to impede these particular fires. The GOA is doubtful they will succeed without better equipment, in particular helicopters.

¶5. The GOA is responding with available resources consisting of military, police, firefighters and forest service personnel and equipment. There are 1300 military personnel, 500 police forces and 800 firefighters engaged in the effort to put down the fires. The likelihood of the first responders to succeed without external assistance, particularly critical aircraft support, is limited. The situation will only become worse, requiring more resources to bring the fires under control. The effort is being coordinated by an inter-ministerial group led by the Deputy Prime Minister. The response is hampered by the rough topography surrounding the fires and the lack of appropriate equipment, such as airplanes and helicopters, to adequately address fighting the fires in remote areas not easily accessed by personnel and trucks.

¶6. The GOA is following the situation closely and has released an appeal to all institutions and international organizations present in Albania to provide assistance. The GOA has requested assistance in the form of emergency aircraft and helicopters for fire fighting operations.

¶7. I propose that the USG disaster relief assistance be used to pay for aircraft and/or helicopter rentals required to extinguish the fires or bring them under control. U.S. Embassy in collaboration with USAID will coordinate with the GOA and other donors to avoid duplication of effort.

CRISTINA